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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3792
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7075
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 5372
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 2831
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 1402
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5819
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 7010
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 7904
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 002714

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA
DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS USTR

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PGOV PHUM KIRF PTER USTR IN
SUBJECT: DATES FIXED FOR FIVE STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

REF: A. NEW DELHI 2378/2289/2265/PREVIOUS
     ¶B. NEW DELHI 2110/1765/PREVIOUS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Election Commission announced that
state legislative elections will be held between November 14
and December 4 in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi,
Mizoram and Rajasthan. The Election Commission deferred a
decision on dates for state assembly elections in Jammu and
Kashmir. While anti-incumbency, inflation and terrorism will
no doubt be factors in these polls, Indian elections are
mostly decided on local issues, which differ from state to
state. These state assembly elections have assumed greater
importance because they are seen as a dry run for
parliamentary elections due before May 2009 and a barometer
of how BJP and the Congress Party stack up against each other
in Hindi-speaking heartland of the country. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On October 14, the Election Commission (EC) set dates
from November 14 through December 4 for state assembly
elections in five states scheduled for polls this year. The
EC deferred a decision on fixing dates for state assembly
elections in Jammu and Kashmir, a state which witnessed
heightened tension (Ref A) this summer over a land use issue
relating to Hindu pilgrims. (Note: We will report septel on
debate regarding timing of Jammu and Kashmir elections.) In
the five states going to the polls, votes will be counted and
results announced on December 8. The election timetable is:

-- Chhattisgarh: November 14 and 20
-- Madhya Pradesh: November 25
-- Delhi: November 29
-- Mizoram: November 29
-- Rajasthan: December 4

¶3. (U) The Congress Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party
(BJP) welcomed the announcement of polling dates. Although
smaller regional parties may play a spoiler role by splitting
the vote in some constituencies, four of the five states will
have the two national parties pitted against each other in
mostly head-to-head contests. In the tiny northeastern state
of Mizoram the contest will be between the Mizo National
Front (MNF) and the Congress Party.

¶4. (U) The BJP is in power in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and

Chhattisgarh, the Congress in Delhi and the MNF in Mizoram.
Each of these parties will have to defend against an
anti-incumbency factor, which is generally strong in Indian
elections. The principal election issues around the country
today are inflation and concerns over terrorism. The
increased public concern over terrorism is likely to be more
of an issue in Delhi and Rajasthan, both of which have
experienced high visibility terrorist attacks this year. A
wild card this year will be "delimitation." The redrawing of
constituency boundaries by an expert commission has changed
elections districts, in some cases quite radically. It has
forced many incumbents and challengers to seek new
constituencies or alter their message to appeal to a
different mix of an electorate.

¶5. (SBU) While anti-incumbency, inflation and terrorism will
be factors in these elections -- to a greater or lesser
extent depending on the state -- Indian elections are mostly
decided on local issues, which differ from state to state.
In Rajasthan, an important variable will be the residual
impact of tension earlier this over the Gujjar community's
demand for economic and political preferences (Ref B). In
Madhya Pradesh, GOI Commerce Minister Kamal Nath is eager to
lead the Congress Party's campaign but there are other
leaders of stature who may undercut him. Even if he is not
projected as the Congress Party's chief ministerial
candidate, he will still play an important part in the
campaign. Obervers will be looking to see whether Uttar
Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati and former BJP breakaway Uma
Bharti can each muster enough support in certain pockets in

Madhya Pradesh to bag a few seats and/or to tilt the results
to one or the other national party. In Chhattisgarh, an
important issue is likely to be the active naxalite/maoist
presence in the state. In Mizoram, the MNF's incumbent chief
minister is battling corruption allegations. Congress leader
Veerappa Moily said that his party would campaign in
BJP-ruled states on the issues of corruption, ineffective
governance, and deteriorating law and order.

¶6. (U) While announcing the election dates, the EC also
noted that a "Model Code of Conduct" would come into effect
immediately. The code of conduct, which is implemented
before any Indian state or national elections, prohibits the
incumbent government from taking any major policy or program
actions that are intended to influence the electorate. The
code also specifies in detail the strict funding and
campaigning rules to be followed by the contestants. Given
the communal clashes in recent weeks in some parts of the
country, the EC also saw it fit to highlight the following
excerpt from the model code of conduct: "There shall be no
appeal to caste or communal feelings for securing votes.
Mosques, Churches, Temples or other places of worship shall
not be used as forum for election propaganda."

¶7. (U) Some other factoids about the assembly elections in
these five states:

	Voters (mill)	Total Seats	Schedule Caste/ Tribe Seats	Polling Stations
Chhattisgarh	15.2	90	30	20,952
Madhya Pradesh	35.7	230	82	46,812
Mizoram	0.6	40	39	1,026
Rajasthan	36.2	200	59	42,212
Delhi	10.9	70	12	10,849

¶8. (SBU) Comment: Since a great deal of political power
rests with the states under India's constitution, state
assembly elections are always fiercely fought. The coming
elections, especially in the four larger states, have assumed
even greater importance because they are seen as a dry run
for the parliamentary elections and a barometer of how BJP
and the Congress Party stack up against each other in a

battle for control in the Hindi-speaking heartland of the
country.
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